

Date of Hearing: April 13, 2021

Chief Counsel: Gregory Pagan

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY

Reginald Byron Jones-Sawyer, Sr., Chair

AB 689 (Petrie-Norris) – As Amended March 18, 2021

SUMMARY: Expands the Office of Emergency Services (OES) Comprehensive Statewide Domestic Violence Program’s 24-hour telephone communication services to possibly include other communications methods offered on a 24-hour or intermittent basis, such as text messaging, computer chat, or any other technology approved by OES.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) States that the Legislature finds the problem of domestic violence to be of serious and increasing magnitude; and that existing domestic violence services are underfunded and that some areas of the state are unserved or underserved. Declares that a goal or purpose of the Office of Emergency Services (OES) shall be to ensure that all victims of domestic violence served by the OES Comprehensive Statewide Domestic Violence Program receive comprehensive, quality services. (Pen. Code, § 13823.15, subd. (a).)
- 2) Establishes under OES a Comprehensive Statewide Domestic Violence Program; the program’s goals are to provide local assistance to existing service providers, to maintain and expand services based on a demonstrated need, and to establish a targeted or directed program for the development and establishment of domestic violence services in currently unserved and underserved areas. OES shall provide financial and technical assistance to local domestic violence centers in implementing all of 14 required services including operating a 24-hour crisis hotline. (Pen. Code, § 13823.15, subd. (b).)
- 3) Establishes the OES and the specified advisory committee to collaboratively administer the Comprehensive Statewide Domestic Violence Program, and requires OES to allocate funds to local centers meeting the criteria for funding. Provides that all organizations funded pursuant to this section shall utilize volunteers to the greatest extent possible. States that the centers may seek, receive, and make use of any funds which may be available from all public and private sources to augment state funds received pursuant to this section. (Pen. Code, § 13823.15, subd. (c).)
- 4) States that centers receiving funding shall provide cash or an in-kind match of at least 10 percent of the funds received pursuant to this section. (Pen. Code, § 13823.15, subd. (c).)
- 5) Defines “domestic violence shelter service provider” or “DVSSP” to mean “a victim services provider that operates an established system of services providing safe and confidential emergency housing on a 24-hour basis for victims of domestic violence and their children, including, but not limited to, hotel or motel arrangements, haven, and safe houses.” (Pen. Code, § 13823.15, subd. (f)(15)(B).)

- 6) States that the funding process for distributing grant awards to DVSSPs shall be administered by the Office of Emergency Services, and including by providing matching funds or in-kind contributions equivalent to not less than 10 percent of the grant they would receive, which may come from other governmental or private sources. (Pen. Code, § 13823.15, subd. (f)(14).)

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown.

COMMENTS:

- 1) **Author's Statement:** According to the author, "This bill modernizes California code to ensure that funding for and reporting about vital crisis communication services offered by Domestic Violence service provider include new text-based technology like computer chat lines and phone texting. By modernizing the requirements to include text-based optional services, Domestic Violence service providers will be better equipped to respond victims of domestic violence who may not feel safe or be able to call a traditional phone-based hotline. Additionally, the state will be better able to track and collect more accurate data about domestic abuse."
- 2) **Domestic Violence Increase During COVID-19:** The stay at home orders issued in response to the COVID-19 pandemic has created an environment for increased domestic violence cases. More than 10 million Americans experience domestic violence, and experts project that isolation to homes, job loss, and overall stress associated with the pandemic will cause that number to increase¹. National domestic violence hotlines have reported a spike in calls since March 2020 when stay at home orders began being enforced. Police statistics reveal that in the city of Los Angeles, as of March 21, aggravated assault crimes, including those of domestic violence, have increased more than 4 percent. Many police stations have closed their reception area in response to the spread of COVID, forcing victims to contact departments via phone for restraining and emergency orders. However many domestic violence shelters have remained open during this time, accepting families and creating quarantine areas to protect those most in need. Domestic violence centers working with survivors are staying connected through increased tele-advocacy and remote intake. As domestic violence centers continue working and implementing social distancing protocols during this pandemic, it is greatly impacting their revenue and ability to raise funds. Cities across California are extending their stay at home orders and social distancing protocols, therefore the suspension of match requirements will allow domestic violence to continue channeling their resources where they are most needed.
- 3) **Argument in Support:** According to *WEAVE*, "Law enforcement agencies across California field an average of 457 domestic violence calls a day. For many victims, calling law enforcement is not the safest or most helpful option, so they turn to other resources like 24/7 crisis response services from organizations like *WEAVE*. Text-based services like computer chat and secure text messaging offer alternative ways for victims to reach out for support, even when a phone call may not be safe. However these services can be costly and technically complex; service providers need resources and assistance to deploy these tools.

¹ <https://ncadv.org/blog/posts/what-dv-orgs-need-to-know-coronavirus>

“By modernizing the statutory requirements to include text based optional communication services, Domestic Violence Service providers will be eligible for technical and financial support for these offerings through CalOES and will be able to offer victims more options for engagement that suit the victim’s need and preferences. These additional services may also help the state to better track and collect more accurate data about domestic violence.”

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

California Partnership to End Domestic Violence
WEAVE INC.

Opposition

None

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